



Department of English & Modern Languages

Bowie State University

ENGLISH 504: SPECIAL TOPICS IN RHETORIC:
THEORY AND PRACTICE IN COMPOSITION STUDIES

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Office Hours: Monday and Friday by appointment
Tuesday 2 – 5
Wednesday 4- 5, 7:30 – 8:30 pm
Thursday 10 – 11, 2 - 4

Course Description:

In this course, students will study current research and pedagogy in composition studies, including theory, classroom practices, and writing assessment (both in the classroom and large-scale standardized testing). Special emphasis will be on the impact of computers and technology in the teaching of writing. This course is appropriate for students intending to conduct research into composition or literacy studies and for those planning to teach at both the secondary and college level.

Required Texts:

Corbett, Edward, et. al. (editors). *The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Johnson, T.R. and Shirley Morahan (editors). *Teaching Composition: Background Readings*. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 2002.

Selfe, Cynthia. *Technology and Literacy in the Twenty-First Century: The Importance of Paying Attention*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999.

Villanueva, Jr., Victor (editor). *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory: a Reader*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1997.

Course Objectives:

Upon completion of this course, the student will be able to:

1. Articulate an informed, personal philosophy of teaching writing
2. Understand the relationships between thinking and writing
3. Identify and analyze the major theories that inform the teaching of writing
4. Demonstrate knowledge of current research in solving pedagogical problems
5. Apply technology to composition studies in the classroom
6. Examine and experience the process of writing
7. Gain experience in observing, guiding, and evaluating learning.

Instructional Modes:

Discussion, lecture, oral reports, observation, critical writing, computer lab

Requirements:

Students are expected

1. to attend every session for which the course is scheduled unless inclement weather conditions necessitate the canceling of classes,
2. to read all assigned texts prior to class on the day those texts are to be discussed.
3. to lead class discussions as appropriate,
4. to work collaboratively both in and outside of class, in face-to-face as well as through electronic communication,
5. to complete all required written assignments,
6. to conduct research using the Internet,
7. to submit all assignments when due,
8. to develop a major focus of inquiry that culminates in a final project.

Evaluation:

The semester grade will be determined as follows:

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| Class participation | 30% |
| General attendance and participation | 10% |
| Backtalk: weekly response papers | 10% |
| Participation in holistic scoring session | 10% |
| Philosophy Paper (including drafts) | 20% |

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| Critical Inquiry Paper | 25% |
| Presentation on Comp Program | 25% |
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| TOTAL | 100% |

As in all graduate courses, students are expected to attend faithfully and prepared to discuss assigned readings thoughtfully. A second part of **class participation** will be weekly papers, “Backtalk” – talking back to the assigned readings. In 1-2 pages, students will briefly summarize one of the articles, then reflect on its classroom implications and challenge some of the assumptions or conclusions. The third element of class participation is a mandatory holistic scoring session that will be held on a Saturday (tentatively scheduled for 15 March) from 9 to 4. A regularly scheduled class will be suspended in return for this Saturday session.

The **philosophy paper**, though a short essay, is a central part of the course. Students will explain their philosophy of teaching composition/writing, a personal statement that, ultimately, will include references to theorists and practitioners. Drafting will start during the first class and continue through the entire course; at the last class (13 May), students will submit the final essay along with all drafts, peer critiques, my comments, and a reflection on the process. Although this paper is a maximum of 1000 words, it may be the most important one you write because it will represent both synthesis and evaluation of your thinking as a composition teacher. Quite often such a statement/paper is required when applying for a job.

The **critical inquiry project** will center on a topic of interest chosen by each student. Possibilities include computers and composition (a specific focus), collaborative learning, reading/writing connections, English for non-native speakers, holistic scoring practices, gender and writing, writing centers, grammar and composition, portfolios... This project will consist of an annotated bibliography of a minimum of 15 sources (electronic copy for everyone in class) and a critical paper synthesizing research and analyzing the conversation on the topic (details forthcoming). The paper itself will be 10-12 pages, due the last week in April.

The **final project** will be a group effort (groups of no more than 4) analyzing a freshman composition program at a specific college or university (definitely College Park and another school in the U. Maryland System). The final result will be a full-fledged 30-45 minute presentation with various bells and whistles (details TBA) both summarizing the program and analyzing its strengths and weaknesses. At least one class will be suspended to permit work on this project, which will involve significant primary research, including collection of documents and data and interviews. Presentation will be before English Department faculty and members of the administration. Criteria for the grade, which will be a group grade, will be developed through a collaborative class process. Presentation is tentatively scheduled for the Reading Day (15 May).